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ABSTRACT

This article discusses some special problems related to bilingual education for Chinese-speaking children. Three major questions are raised. The first results from confusion over the meaning of the term "Chinese"; one must decide whether Mandarin, Canton, or Taishan should be used as the language of instruction. It is suggested that Mandarin be used because it is the accepted official language in the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and the United Nations and because it is necessary for reading and writing. The second question is whether to teach Mandarin or another dialect to the English-speaking students in a bilingual program. Mandarin is again suggested because it has a simpler sound system and because it can be studied further at many U.S. universities. Finally, there is the question of whether characters or alphabetical writing should be used and whether traditional or simplified characters should be used. The use of characters is advocated because it is the form used by Chinese speakers. The simplified system is also advocated because it offers many advantages, including the fact that it is used at the United Nations. (AM)

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SOME EXTRA PROBLEMS THAT THE BILINGUAL TEACHERS OF CHINESE CHILDREN SHOULD CONSIDER

Peter Chin-tang Wang

The bilingual program for Chinese children faces more complicated problems than those for Chicano and Black children. To begin with, the term "Chinese" is not clearly defined since there are so many Chinese dialects and some of them are mutually unintelligible. In the article "Supreme Court Rules in Lau vs Nichols Case" in the Linguistic Reporter Vol. 16, No. 3, March 1974, "Chinese" is used as the native language of the students of Chinese ancestry. In the Minutes of the Chinese Bilingual Programs Workshop, Babel Media Center, Berkeley, Nov. 25 & 27 and the Minutes of the May 31, 1974 Meeting of State Federation of Chinese Bilingual Educators, it was indicated that "Chinese" is the native language of the children of Chinese ancestry. Also the bilingual teachers' training program advertisement put out by Seton Hall University uses the term "Chinese" without any clarification. Since "Chinese" includes mutually unintelligible dialects like Cantonese and Mandarin[1], the problems between Mandarin and Cantonese do not seem to have been properly recognized and dealt with in present Chinese bilingual programs.

From some of the teaching materials prepared for the Chinese bilingual program in California, it can be seen that there is a confusion between Mandarin and Cantonese.[2] Traditional and simplified characters are both used. A few questions involving this confusion might be raised here. Should Mandarin or Pu tung hua, the national language of China, or Cantonese, a regional dialect China, be used in teaching all subjects in elementary levels? If Cantonese, the dialect of most of the children of Chinese ancestry in the United States, is used, what is the position of Mandarin in a Chinese bilingual program? Should it be an integral part

of the bilingual program for children speaking Cantonese or should it be considered irrelevant in such a program as appears to be the case in San Francisco State University.[3] If it should not be included, then should alphabetical writing be used instead of Chinese characters? Should traditional forms of characters or simplified ones used in the People's Republic of China be taught? Should English speaking children in a Chinese bilingual class be taught Mandarin or Cantonese? It seems to me that unless these problems are properly recognized and solved, any Chinese bilingual program will suffer the difficulties of confusion, inefficiency and lack of clear goals. These problems will be discussed in the following with some suggestions from this writer.

In California and New York, the majority of Chinese children who speak little or no English are mostly from Hong Kong, Canton and its vicinities or US Chinatowns. People in these places speak Cantonese which is, itself, a cover term including a number of mutually intelligible and unintelligibly dialects, a fact DeFrancisfailed to recognize (1950). For example, Canton dialect and Taishan dialect which are the main dialects of Chinese Americans are mutually unintelligible (Cheng 1973). However, both are called Cantonese. Even Canton and Taishan dialects have minor variations from village to village. Since most of these children speak one variety or the other of Cantonese, Canton dialect which is considered the standard dialect in the Canton province, should be used in teaching all subjects since the children can communicate only in this dialect. If most of the children in a class can only speak Taishan dialect, Taishan dialect is preferred without any doubt. The Teacher who only speaks Canton dialect should not teach these children. It would be unfair to assume that these children have the same Canton

dialectal background even though it is much easier for these children to pick up Canton dialect than English. If most of the children are Mandarin speakers, there is no doubt that Mandarin should be used and the problem of teaching reading and writing is considerably reduced.[4] Before going to the next question, a brief survey of the general situation between Cantonese and Mandarin is necessary to make the discussion clearer.

In the past, more than 70% of the Chinese population spoke one variety or the other Mandarin (DeFrancis 1950:23, Chao 1947:3-4). After a long and heated debate, Mandarin, the "speech of educated adults native to the city of Peking" (DeFrancis 1950:228) has become the standard national language in China. Today Mandarin is the standard language in the People's Republic of China (called Pu tung hua 'common language'), in Taiwan, as well as among the Chinese in the Philipines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Furthermore, all the people in Canton province can speak Mandarin today. Some visitors who came back from visiting Canton even claimed that there would be fewer Cantonese speakers in another thirty years.[5] While this claim may be an exaggeration, it clearly indicates that everyone in Canton now can speak Mandarin. In recent years, there is an increasing number of Mandarin speakers in San Francisco Chinatown.[6] Though Cheng (1973) predicted that Cantonese dialects are not likely to be replaced by Mandarin, it is possible that all these people can converse in Mandarin as so many young Cantonese speakers learn Mandarin. In 1974 Mandarin Speech Contest sponsored by the Chinese Language Teachers' Association of California[7], more than two thirds of the thirty eight contestants were Cantonese native speakers. This fact indicates that Mandarin is popular among high school and university Cantonese speaking students. So it is a clear fact that more than eight hundred million

Chinese today communicate in Mandarin which is also an official language in the United Nations. If these children learn only their own dialect, they would find that they could not communicate with the greater majority of Chinese and would feel no pride in visiting the United Nations when they could not understand "Chinese". Should a bilingual teacher let this be a result of the Chinese bilingual education? Furthermore, if a bilingual teacher only uses Cantonese in teaching all subjects, could he ignore Mandarin? This question depends on the goals of bilingual education and the question of reading and writing.

One of the recognized goals in a bilingual program is that the native language of the children should be developed further in reading and writing.[8] If reading and writing should be developed, the question is whether Chinese characters or alphabetical writing be used in reading and writing. There had also been a long debate in the first few decades of twentieth century (DeFrancis 1950) on whether characters should have been abolished and alphabetical writing should be used instead. Today, it seems that we do not have to go through that long agonizing argument again since characters are still used in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, overseas Chinese communities and the United Nations. Though occasionally, one will hear that Chinese writing should go to Latinization, there is no indication that any alphabetical writing will replace characters in China (Wang 1974) or elsewhere. However, the bilingual teachers may decide on using alphabetical writing which will be very close to the children's spoken language. Then they have to decide on which alphabetical system is to be used. They may choose one from a number of alphabetical systems (Chao 1947:31-33). They may create their own.[9] If a Chinese bilingual program should decide on alphabetical writing,

it would introduce an alien cultural element which would be very much different from the traditional and modern Chinese writing which is also an official writing in the United Nations. Different alphabetical systems would have to be used for both Canton dialect and Taishan dialect. As a result, the children in these two groups might not be able to write to each other, not to mention to Chinese elsewhere. And they would be isolated from Chinese books where their cultural heritage lies (Chao 1947:12). It seems that this is not a desirable goal of any Chinese bilingual program.

From the materials prepared by the Chinese bilingual teachers in California, it is clearly indicated that they try to teach Chinese characters. If they try to teach characters, there is a very important problem they cannot afford to ignore. It was mentioned earlier that one of the recognized goals in a bilingual program is to develop the skill of reading and writing in the children's native language, in this case Canton and Taishan dialects. The serious problem is that there are no newspapers, magazines, or other literature printed in these two dialects either in China, Hong Kong or US Chinatowns except in a few cartoons or space-filler jokes in the newspapers or magazines. As far as I know, I have not seen any books written in Cantonese dialects with characters. Instead, all the literature, scientific books, magazines, newspapers have been using Mandarin as the writing media since 1917 literary movement (Chao 1947:7). This is a fact recognized by the Research Committee on Teaching Chinese (1968:3) which was officially appointed by Hong Kong Department of Education in 1967 and Young (1970) in his article "Problems Should be Considered Before Translation". Most of the popular traditional novels that all Chinese are familiar with like The Dream of Red Chamber,

are in Mandarin. Unfortunately, in reading and writing, Cantonese or other dialect speakers have to learn to express themselves in Mandarin, even though Cantonese dialects enjoy high prestige in Taiwan, Hong Kong and U.S. Chinatowns. This is an additional burden to Cantonese or other dialect speakers who want to become literate. In Hong Kong schools, the teacher has to remind the students often that they cannot use certain oral expressions or syntactic arrangements in their compositions. All the students in Hong Kong can tell that their classmates from North or Central China usually write better compositions than they do. They also realize that their classmates have the advantage of writing the way they speak. Because of the differences between the oral and written forms, Young (1970) reports that there is a general declination of the students' Chinese reading and writing standards. This does not mean that there are no influential and good Cantonese writers. On the contrary, there have been many excellent Cantonese writers. For example, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a native of Canton and the leader of the 1911 Revolution, wrote his revolutionary ideas in Mandarin. One can also find evidence in the newspapers and magazines published in Hong Kong and U. S. Chinatowns. It explains the fact that it is very easy for Cantonese speaking students to pick up Mandarin because they have studied Mandarin in their reading and writing. A few examples that are used in speaking but not in writing in Cantonese, will make the situation clearer. In writing, Mandarin expressions are used. For example: for mhi^{o} yex 'what'[10], Cantonese speaking students are taught to write shi mo[11] in Cantonese. Many words have reading pronunciations only and are not used in conversation[12]. If a student uses ka^{o} 'home' in his conversation, he or she would sound very stiff, literary and pretentious. Yet, both words okkhee and ka^{o} are introduced in Chinese Language Guide, Level 1 prepared by Babel (Bay Area Bilingual Education League) without

an explanation. It is presumed that the teacher will tell the students, like the teacher in Hong Kong, that the form Okkhee is for speaking; the form ka^{0} is for reading and writing. There are quite a number of these differences even though the general grammatical structures between Cantonese and Mandarin are very similar. Since the students have to read and write in Mandarin, wouldn't it be better to include Mandarin as an integral part in the bilingual program for Cantonese speaking children? If reading and writing skills should be included in instruction, there is no advantage in not including Mandarin as an integral part of any Chinese bilingual program. Instead of letting the students learn to read and write in Mandarin as a literary style and wait until they go to high school or university to learn to speak the way they write, it seems that to teach Mandarin as an integral part of the Chinese bilingual program will definitely help the students in acquiring the skills of reading and writing faster and better. So both the officially appointed Research Committee on teaching Chinese (1968) and Young (1970) recommend to offer Mandarin in Hong Kong schools in order to improve the students' Chinese reading and writing ability. It will be wise for the Chinese bilingual programs not to repeat the situation that has happened in Hong Kong schools--a situation that Hong Kong educators are trying to correct.

The next related question is which one of these: Canton dialect, Taishan dialect, or Mandarin should be used in teaching the English speaking classmates in a bilingual and bicultural class? Should they learn Canton or Taishan dialect first and learn to read and write in Mandarin? It is easier for Cantonese speakers to pick up Mandarin than English because the grammatical structures of Mandarin and Cantonese are very much alike and there are systematic similarities and systematic differences between the two sound

systems (Wang 1951). But the sound system of Mandarin is much simpler than Cantonese. For example, Mandarin has only four tones against seven tones in Taishan dialect (Cheng 1973) and eight in Canton dialect (Chao 1947), some people say, nine in Canton dialect (Yuan 1960). There is no doubt that Mandarin four tones are easier to distinguish and to remember. Mandarin does not have final p, t, k, m, which are in Cantonese (Chao 1947:4, Karlgren 1962:16:21). The simplicity of the Mandarin sound system was an important factor that it was in its choice as the Chinese national language.

Judging from all these social, cultural and linguistic factors, would it be better to teach Mandarin to a bilingual class? Being a national language, Mandarin is offered now in many universities across the United States. The English speaking classmates in a Chinese bilingual class can further their study of "Chinese," Mandarin in this case, later on in many universities around the country. This is also an important factor that bilingual teachers should take into consideration in planning their programs.

Finally, there is the problem of characters. In USEFUL English/Chinese Expressions in the Classroom prepared by Wanda Au and Ellen Kwong, some traditional forms were changed into simplified forms and many that could have been changed to simplified forms remain unchanged. It seems better to have uniformity in characters. A choice should be made between traditional forms and simplified forms. I have heard many people insist on teaching traditional forms. They claim that the switch from traditional forms to simplified forms is relatively easy.[13] But it would be better to teach simplified forms from the beginning; the switch from simplified forms to traditional forms can be equally easy.[14] However, simplified forms offer many advantages: (1) The students would certainly save much time in learn-

ing to write simplified forms. (2) They are simpler and fit better to computer programming. Because of computer programming, it will not take too long before those who insist on using traditional forms will switch to simplified forms. As a matter of fact, few people today would not use simplified forms in their correspondences to a certain degree. (3) Traditional forms were made for literary Chinese not for modern vernacular Chinese.[15] When they are used for modern vernacular Chinese, they deviate too far from the principles of Liu Shu (the traditional classification of of Chinese writing system). Simplified forms are closer to the principles of Liu Shu (Kuo 1974). (4) They are the official forms used in the United Nations. (5) Simplified characters are associated with a new China which no longer suffers the image of defeat and occupation of foreign powers and many people smoking opium in opium dens. The students will be proud of the new image associated with simplified forms. This pride will "at once help him (the student) to improve his self-image and increase his success potential, so that he will better be able to benefit from what the educational system has to offer him." (Saville & Troike 1971:32)

In conclusion, any Chinese bilingual program has to decide on the questions raised here. Some views about these questions are provided by this writer, as a linguist, for further discussion by the Chinese bilingual teachers and program directors.

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NOTES

1/ See discussion and comparison between Mandarin and Cantonese in DeFrancis (1950: 192-198) and Chao (1947:4-5).

2/ See the pamphlet USEFUL English/Chinese Expressions for Classroom by Winnie Au & Ellen Kwong for example.

3/ I wrote this paper because I was told of this situation. It is possible that they might change their minds. I hope they will consider this.

4/ There are relatively fewer children in this category. Because Mandarin speakers do not concentrate in these two centers, most of them scatter around the country and live in the white neighborhoods. If the children do not pick up English at home, they would learn it from their neighbors before they go to school. In some cases, the problem is simply ignored since there are not many of them in a class.

The Census of California School Pupils with Non-English Speaking or Limited-English-Speaking Ability 1972-73, published by California State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1974 bears this out. It indicates that the number of Cantonese non-English-speaking pupils in California public schools, from grade 1-12 is 1,017 and the number of Mandarin non-English-speaking pupils in California public schools from grade 1-12 is only 6; the number of Cantonese limited-English-speaking pupils in California public schools from grade 1-12 is 5,206 while the number of Mandarin limited-English-speaking pupils in California Public schools, from grade 1-12 is also 6.

5/ This was achieved by education, meetings, study groups, transferring people to work in other provinces or marriages with people from other provinces. There has been no official discouragement of the use of local dialects as I was told.

6/ I visited San Francisco Chinatown a few times. Each time I went there I heard more people speak Mandarin with some Cantonese accent. Quite a few clerks and sales girls spoke Mandarin to me when I tried to use my poor Cantonese to make requests.

7/ It was held on May 25, 1974 at San Francisco State University.

8/ See Minutes of Chinese Bilingual Programs Workshop, Babe Media Center, Nov. 26 & 27, 1973. This idea was also suggested in A Handbook of Bilingual Education by Muriel R. Saville and Rudolp C. Troike, (1971:50).

[9]I have checked the few systems presented in Chao's book (1947) and the one used by Parker Huang and Gerard P. Kok in Speak Cantonese (1960). It seems to me that Wanda Au and Ellen Kwong created their own system in USEFUL English/Chinese Expressions for the Classroom. They did not describe how each symbol is prounced or marked the tones. However, they have made a cassette available.

[10]The alphabetic writing system is from Chao's Cantonese Primer (1947).

[11]This is Pinyin 'Spelling' system use in China and in Beginning Chinese by DeFrancis (1963).

[12]A similar situation exists in other dialects. The reading pronunciations are not Mandarin. One may refer to an analysis of this situation in Amoy dialect in "A Study of Literary and Colloquial Amoy Chinese" by Margaret M. Y. Sung (1973).

[13]In summer 1967 at Seton Hall University, John DeFrancis advised a group of high school teachers to follow this suggestion. Many teachers gave me the same response when I read a paper "How to Solve Initial Shocks of Learning Chinese" at the Chinese Language Teacher's Association of California at San Francisco State University on April 28, 1973. The above mentioned paper is available through ERIC, Modern Language Association of America.

[14]I made this suggestion in "How to Solve Initial Shocks of Learning Chinese" see Note 13. I found the same ideas expressed Chin-chuan Cheng's "Computer-Based Chinese Teaching Program at Illinois" (1973).

[15]A clear indication of this point is that there are many words like 吗,呢,呵,啦 in Mandarin writing, 嘢,咗,呀 in Cantonese writing. One will not find these words in literary Chinese.

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